

What Can You Do to Make Ethics Interesting?

Let's face it. Talking about ethics is boring. Ask any chapter program chairs about trying to make Ethics Awareness Month interesting. They will tell you that trying to find an interesting person to talk about ethics is very difficult and that most of the programs on ethics are poorly attended.

In my 51 years in the insurance business, I have found the best way to sell an idea, or an insurance coverage, is with a story. A huge claim that was paid, or an intriguing liability lawsuit that involves juicy details, is a great way to get your point across about ethical situations.

Want a good idea for a program? How about politics? How many times on radio or television have you heard the following statement — or at least a paraphrase of it — “My candidate has the utmost integrity, and your candidate is completely lacking in integrity. Your candidate violated every ethical standard.”

Unless you have some way to independently measure integrity, or have an agreed set of ethical standards, the above statements are completely meaningless. There is no possible way to judge integrity or ethics without agreed-upon standards. Then, let an independent party decide.

L. Murphy Smith, DBA, CPA, an accounting professor at Texas A&M University, says that on a personal level, everyone must answer the following question: “What is my biggest aspiration?” The answer might be wealth, fame, knowledge, popularity or integrity. But if integrity is secondary to any of the alternatives, it will be sacrificed in situations in which a choice must be made. The situations will inevitably occur in every person’s life.

What are politicians’ aspirations? Fame, wealth, popularity? My guess is that somewhere along the line, many politicians have compromised their integrity to achieve their aspiration. It would take a big person to admit it, but it would be refreshing to hear.

It’s very easy to pick on the ethical values or integrity of politicians. But we should each look in the mirror. Haven’t there been times when we compromised our integrity or ethics to reach our biggest aspiration? My bet is that

Designation Revoked

Steven A. Pfeiffer has been notified that his right to use the CPCU designation has been revoked, effective Dec. 15, 2010, pursuant to Rule 3.3 of the CPCU Code of Professional Conduct.



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somewhere in our lives it has happened — that sooner or later our integrity is secondary.

As CPCUs, we have the CPCU Code of Professional Conduct — the standard by which we are judged. It’s not always easy to determine whether a standard has been violated. If you would like to learn more, the CPCU Society Ethics Committee will present a seminar at the 2011 Annual Meeting and Seminars in Las Vegas entitled, “Point/Counterpoint — Ethics, Morals and the Law.” If it is your aspiration to be the best insurance person you can be, come join us. We guarantee that the thought-provoking questions and audience participation will make this aspiration a reality. ■

Editor’s note: The opinions expressed in this column are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the CPCU Society membership, the Society’s Ethics Committee or the author’s employer. If you have suggestions for upcoming articles or comments about the “Question of Ethics” column, please contact William F. Traester, CPCU, at wtraester@archinsurance.com.

2011 Ethics Awareness Month Takes a Bow

Society members, individually as well as collectively in chapters, celebrated Ethics Awareness Month in March with fanfare, creativity and flair! The North Alabama Chapter, for example, met at a local comedy club for “Ethics and Humor in the Workplace.” A local business executive spoke on ethics and moral principles, and the turnout was great.

The CPCU Society again sponsored a contest for chapters that acknowledges the unique ways Ethics Awareness Month can be celebrated. The winning chapter will be announced in the May *e-LINK*. Thank you everyone for your support and participation. ■